Transgender young people's narratives of intimacy and sexual health: Implications for sexuality education

Damien W. Riggs[a] and Clare Bartholomaeus[a]

[a]*College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*

Postal address: College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, SA 5001 damien.riggs@flinders.edu.au

Abstract

Sexuality education as pedagogy is often fraught by the perceived need to balance the informational needs of young people with an investment in notions of childhood innocence. Nowhere is this perhaps more evident than in sexuality education that seeks to be inclusive of transgender young people, often resulting in the failure of such education to address the needs of such students. In an attempt at addressing the relative dearth of information about what transgender young people would like to see covered in sexuality education, in this article we explore transgender young people's accounts of intimacy and sexual health and consider what this means for school-based sexuality education. To do this we analyse discussions of intimacy from the perspectives of transgender young people as narrated in a sample of YouTube videos. We conclude by advocating for an approach to sexuality education that largely eschews the gendering of body parts and gametes, and which instead focuses on function, so as to not only address the needs of transgender young people (who may find normative discussions of genitals distressing), but to also provide cisgender young people with a more inclusive understanding of their own and other people's bodies and desires.

Keywords: transgender; sexuality education; school; social media; gender; bodies

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Introduction

The sexual health needs and experiences of transgender young people is a rarely discussed topic in the context of school-based sexuality education around the world (UNESCO, 2016). It is perhaps understandable, to a degree, that focusing on the sexual health needs and experiences of transgender young people is fraught. First, focusing on *all* young people and their sexual health needs and experiences is fraught by the presumption of childhood innocence and the fear of 'corrupting' young people (Bhana 2016; Robinson 2012). Second, people who are transgender continue to be sexualised and pathologised. Dominant discourses, such as those in the media, frame transgender people, particularly transgender women, as highly sexualised, including a focus on sex work (e.g. Betcher 2013). People who are transgender also continue to be pathologised, when their gender is viewed as disordered (e.g. Ansara and Hegarty 2012). Fear of compounding such sexualisation and pathologisation may explain why many books that focus on transgender young people (e.g. Brill and Kenney 2016; Krieger 2011) and specifically in the context of education (Bryan 2012; Meyer 2011; Meyer and Pullen Sansfaçon 2014; Miller 2016), are all but silent on the topic of transgender young people and sex. Yet as Tompkins (2014, 776) argues:

> A sex-positive trans politics that recognizes and celebrates diversity in identities, bodies, and constructions of sexual relationships cannot develop in communities without conversations about trans sexualities and trans sex. Without these discussions, we also potentially risk the sexual health of our communities, in terms of our physical, psychological, and relationship health. How can we expect to find easily accessible information about trans people and safer sex if we are unable to have conversations about trans sexualities and sexual relationships? What does silence around attraction to or desire for trans people mean for trans youth and the development of their sexual relationships as they get older?

Following from this, then, we may suggest that not attending to the sexuality education

needs of transgender young people constitutes a form of cisgenderism by omission (i.e., by failing to focus on transgender young people's own understandings of their bodies and genders). As such, and taking up Tompkins' call for a sex-positive trans politics, in this article we explore how transgender young people – and specifically teenagers and young adults – speak about sexual health and intimacy. In the first section below we summarise key points related to transgender young people's sexual health needs that have been reported in previous research. We then turn to explore discussions of intimacy from the perspectives of transgender young people as narrated in a sample of YouTube videos. We conclude the article by outlining the key issues that we believe require attention in the context of sexuality education for transgender young people in schools into the future.

Transgender young people's sexual health needs and experiences as documented in previous research

As we noted above, there is a relative dearth of coverage of topics related to intimacy, sexual health, and relationships in the majority of texts published on transgender young people, and specifically teenagers. An exception is *Beyond Magenta* (Kuklin, 2014), a book which documents the lives of six transgender teenagers. In one of the chapters, Christina discusses her experiences with sex and relationships, including feelings about her body and the impact of taking estrogen on her sex drive. In addition, a small number of books targeted towards transgender and gender diverse young people mention relationships, intimacy, and sex (Rainess 2015; Testa, Coolhart, and Peta 2015). Some of the education-focused books mention sexuality education and the importance of being inclusive of transgender young people (e.g. Bryan 2012; Meyer 2011), but lack specific details about the types of topics that should be covered. In order to compile a picture of the current state of play with regard to transgender young people and their

sexual health needs and experiences, our review of the literature identified five main areas of focus, each of which we now explore in turn.

Sexuality education

While critiques of the heteronormativity of sexuality education and the need for the inclusion of sexuality diversity has been noted for some time (e.g. Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015; Buston and Hart 2001; Elia and Eliason 2010; McNeill 2013), very little has been written about sexuality education in relation to transgender people. Riggs (2013) has noted, for example, the ways in which sexuality education websites drawn on by schools typically only refer to people who are gay or lesbian, and ignore those who may be bisexual, transgender, intersex, or queer. Green (2010) further argues for the need to move beyond 'Trans 101' sessions, and to provide more in-depth, diverse, and inclusive narratives about transgender people, as well as using gender neutral language rather than drawing on gender binaries. More recently, Owen (2017, 568) has argued that:

> Rather than integrating definitional notions of transgender identity into models of sexuality education curriculum, we might think instead about how to radically reconceptualize the work of sexuality education in such a way that it does not rely on gendered or sexual identity categories for its efficacy.

The need to include gender diversity and/or specifically pay attention to the needs of transgender students has been noted in several key sexuality education guides and overviews, including *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States 2004), *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* (WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA 2010), and the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (UNESCO 2009), as well as reports such as the *Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People in Asia and the*

Pacific (UNFPA, UNESCO, and WHO 2015). However, it is clear that in some cases terminology and framing needs to be brought up to date.

In research studies from Australia (Robinson et al. 2014; Jones et al. 2016) and the UK (Terence Higgins Trust 2016) and an informational booklet from the UK (Gendered Intelligence n.d.), sexuality education is specifically mentioned with regard to the needs of transgender young people. In terms of the research studies, one notes that many young people turn to the internet or media to learn about sex, due to the scarcity of coverage of areas related to transgender people in school-based sex education (Robinson et al. 2014). The second, drawing on Australian research with transgender and gender diverse young people, found that two-thirds of the 186 survey participants viewed their schools' sexuality education as 'mostly inappropriate' with less than 10% viewing it as 'mostly appropriate' (Jones et al. 2016). Similarly, research in the UK has found that sexuality education was severely lacking in addressing the needs of transgender and gender diverse students (Terence Higgins Trust 2016). In terms of the informational booklet we identified, it notes the importance of focusing on identities more so than bodies (Gendered Intelligence n.d.) when speaking with transgender young people about sexuality.

Caring intimate relationships

In terms of caring intimate and/or romantic relationships, only a small number of studies have focused on the experiences of transgender young people. In their Canadian study, Veale and colleagues (2015) report that of the 923 transgender young people they surveyed, 69% of those aged between 14 and 18 had been in a romantic relationship. In their study of 137 Dutch transgender young people aged between 10 and 17, Bungener and colleagues (2017) found that a majority reported that they had been in love, though

only just over half had been in a romantic relationship. Of these only a very small number (5%) had engaged in sexual activity. Boys were more experienced than girls in terms of intimacy in general, though girls were more experienced in sexual intercourse. Half of those who had engaged in sexual intimacy reported that they had not used their genitals during sexual contact, due to feelings of dysphoria. Overall, Bungener and colleagues report that the young people in their sample had less sexual experience of any kind than young people in the general population. Contrarily, Tobin's (2013) interview research with 15 transgender young people reports that many engaged in sexual contact involving their genitals, though this was true more for young men than women.

Violent intimate relationships

While caring intimate relationships have been given some attention in the literature on transgender young people, unfortunately, and mirroring research on transgender adults, more attention has been given to the experiences of transgender young people who experience violent relationships. Many of the books mentioned in the introduction that do not include a focus on intimacy, do nonetheless mention the potential for relationship violence. While this focus on violence is realistic given the high rates of crimes committed against transgender people by cisgender intimate partners (Riggs, Fraser, Taylor, Signal & Donovan, 2016), the focus primarily or solely on relationship-related risks potentially fails to equip transgender young people with knowledge about caring and pleasurable relationships, and perpetuates the image of transgender people as experiencing lives solely or primarily marked by unhappiness or pain.

In the study of 923 transgender young people living in Canada conducted by Veale and colleagues (2015) introduced above, while there are a small number of sentences on

caring relationships, much more attention is given to relationship violence. For example, they note that of those young people who had been in a romantic relationship, 27% had experienced physical abuse. Beyond intimate relationships, a majority of the participants reported experiences of sexual harassment, and 37% reported that such harassment was physical. Finally, they note that 23% of the participants reported being coerced into sexual intercourse.

Challenges to safer sex

Continuing on with the focus on negative experiences related to intimacy, one study focuses on HIV-related risks amongst transgender young people. While this paper stands alone in its focus on young people, it sits in the context of a much wider number of studies on transgender adults and HIV-related risk. In their study of 120 transgender young women aged between 15 and 24 living in either Los Angeles or Chicago, Wilson and colleagues (2009) found that those participants who had engaged in sex work were four times more likely to be HIV positive than those who had not engaged in sex work. Not completing school was a key predictor in engaging in sex work, suggesting that a lack of education relating to HIV transmission, and a lack of employment opportunities arising from under education, makes transgender young women especially vulnerable to sex work, and specifically sex work where safer sex practices are not utilised (see, e.g. Grant et al. 2011).

Pregnancy

Finally with regard to the previous literature, unwanted pregnancies are identified as a key issue facing many transgender young people. Many of the documents examined note that hormone therapies are not effective contraceptives (e.g. Gendered Intelligence, n.d.), and note this because of a wide spread assumption that hormone therapies lead to

infertility. While this can be true for some transgender young people, it is not true for all, and thus pregnancy risk (in addition to the transmissions of sex-related infections) is of considerable concern with regard to transgender young people who are involved in sexual activities.

Drawing on their wider survey of 923 transgender young people living in Canada, Veale and colleagues (2016) report separately on a sub-sample of 544 participants who responded to a question related to pregnancies. Of these participants, 52 reported that they had been involved in sexual activities that could result in a pregnancy, and of these four had ever been pregnant. Of the 52 who had been involved in sexual activities that could result in a pregnancy, ten had previously had a sexually transmitted infection.

Transgender young people's self-representations of intimacy

For the purposes of this article, we conducted searches of both Google and YouTube in March 2017, in order to identify materials where transgender young people spoke about intimate relationships. Search terms were 'trans* teen relationships' 'trans* teen sexual health', 'trans* teen dating', 'trans* teen sex education', 'trans* adolescent relationships', 'trans* adolescent sexual health', 'trans* adolescent dating', and 'trans* adolescent sex education'. Using these search terms, a total of 24 videos were identified. Watching these videos resulted in the exclusion of 17 of the videos, which, despite the titles, only mentioned one of the search criteria in passing, or did not include mention of the individual's own experiences. The sources in the final sample were geographically diverse across English-speaking countries, with young people from the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. The seven videos that we analysed are included in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

The seven videos included in the analysis were created by five different young people. In order to provide a context, we give a demographic background to each of these young people here, gained from the videos analysed and the YouTube accounts. Alex Bertie and his partner Jake are from the UK. They are both 19 and describe themselves as 'FTM'. Nikki Piława is from New Zealand (and currently lives in Australia), and is 20 years old. In the video in the analysis she describes herself as a 'transgender girl' and as a 'non-op transsexual', which she explains refers to people who 'do not wish to get sex reassignment surgery'. Stef Sanjati is 19 years old and from Canada. In her video 'Trans Sexuality 101' she says that 'I myself have so far have only been attracted to men so I am a straight trans woman'. Given the often invisible nature of whiteness to white people, it is perhaps unsurprising that these first four young people do not make mention of their race. By contrast Kat Blaque is a 25-year-old trans woman from the US who speaks actively from her standpoint as a Black woman. Trinity is also from the US and is 18 years old. Her YouTube profile describes her as 'transgender female' and in a post on her Instagram account she says she is a 'transgender person of color'. We acknowledge that many of the accounts we include for analysis are by young adults rather than school-aged young people, however given the young adults are reflecting on their previous experiences, we feel they offer an important insight into the much over looked experiences of transgender young people in terms of intimacy and sexuality education.

It is also important to acknowledge that transgender young people who post on YouTube are a particular group of people who are willing and able to record and publish narrative videos and, in some cases, are looking to build a following via the videos and other media they post. This form of media is recognised as an important

outlet for transgender young people, but is also influenced by accepted narratives and ways of producing such videos (e.g. Horak 2014; O'Neill 2014). Combining this analysis with the broader literature available (outlined above and discussed further below) nonetheless enables us to provide a more general picture of transgender young people's sexual health needs and intimacy, sex, and relationships experiences.

Having determined the final sample of sources for analysis, each was then watched again so as to identify key mentions of intimacy or intimacy related information (such as sexuality education). Each of these mentions was transcribed verbatim. All of the transcribed extracts were then analysed thematically, with the aim of identifying key patterns that repeated across the extracts. In terms of the specific steps involved in a thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) refining specifics of the themes, and (6) selecting extracts that best illustrate the themes identified. In terms of the first stage, the first author repeatedly read the entire corpus of data, coding for topics that appeared in more than one video so as to identify prevalent topics. Having coded all of the data in this way, the coded extracts were then reviewed by the first author in order to identify key themes that best described patterns evident in the coded data. The first author generated these key themes and the second author then reviewed and confirmed them. Representative extracts from each theme were then selected by the first author, and the focus of each theme refined. Five key themes were identified through the analysis, and each of these are now explored in turn drawing on representative extracts. Given the materials that we examined are all public documents, we have retained the names of the creators rather than allocating pseudonyms.

The failings of sexuality education

The first theme identified both mirrors previous research (e.g. Robinson et al. 2014; Jones et al. 2016; Terence Higgins Trust 2016) in terms of acknowledging the lack of trans-specific sexuality education – as evident in the first quote below – while also making some suggestions about what such education might cover so as to be inclusive of transgender people, as evident in the second quote:

> We get taught sex education in school, but they don't really cover anything other than the binary man and woman. There is hardly anything about gay sex, or lesbian sex, or transgender people, it's only touched on lightly. We kind of have to really figure it out all for ourselves (Nikki Piława, 25 February 2016)

> In sex education [it would be good to see] a breakdown of how, you know, not only men have certain parts and women have certain parts, but that these parts are just parts. I think maybe what would be great would be to take the idea that these parts are not gender specific, you know, because often we would talk about sex ed, and we would do 'boys are over here, girls over here, girls learn about this, boys learn about that', and they have these conversations within themselves, but you know not all girls have genitalia that people expect girls to have, not all boys have the genitalia that people expect for boys to have, and I think that there are there are really valuable conversations to be had about *both* of those situations (Kat Blaque, 1 May 2016)

In the first quote, Nikki Piława speaks about her experiences of intimacy as a young woman, making reference to sex education in terms of how ill-prepared she was for intimacy. Much of Piława's discussion, as we highlight in the following theme, focuses on the challenges that transgender women face in dating and negotiating boundaries, which has been documented in relation to the fetishing of transgender women's bodies, and a lack of respect for transgender women's bodily autonomy (Riggs, von Doussa & Power, 2015). Therefore, her reference to sex education indicates the important of the provision of information to transgender young people, who otherwise are left to 'figure

it out for ourselves', and for some of whom this may lead to unwanted or negative experiences.

The second quote is taken from a web series by Kat Blaque, who invites questions and comments to her social media, and then in each episode responds to one specific question or comment. For Blaque, an inclusive sex education would focus on the de-gendering of body parts – a point that we explore in more detail in the fourth theme below – and the importance of breaking down gender binaries. We take these suggestions up in further detail in the conclusion of this article.

Fears of fetishisation or pathologisation

As we noted above, one of the consequences of inadequate sexuality education is that many transgender young people may be ill-prepared for the types of responses they may receive when dating, especially when dating cisgender people. In her video about dating, Nikki Piława speaks about the ways in which transgender women may often experience fetishisation by cisgender men, who are attracted to them only in relation to specific bodily configurations or sex acts*:*

> there are many [men] who like transgender girls and only like them for their genitalia, for their penis, and it's just a fetish for them, and they will expect you to do things like 'top' them [i.e., anally penetrate] or for them to constantly touch you, and if you're not comfortable with that then that person is not right for you. You need to find someone who will respect your boundaries, and if you are not comfortable with being touched then you need to let that person know (Nikki Piława, 25 February 2016)

For Piława, the potential for fetishisation requires transgender young women to 'feel out the situation' so as to know in advance what expectations potential intimate partners might have. As has been noted in previous research (e.g., Riggs, von Doussa & Power,

2015; Belawski and Sojka 2014), an expectation or fear of fetishisation can serve as a barrier to transgender people exploring the possibility of an intimate relationship. This is a problem facing all transgender people, but perhaps especially for young people, and combined with often significant experiences of dysphoria – as we explore in the following theme – it can mean that many transgender young people are alienated from the possibility of dating or intimate relationships.

Negotiating dysphoria

As we noted above, living with dysphoria is a very common experience amongst many (though not all) transgender young people. As Hill-Meyer and Scarborough (2014, 356) write:

> Dysphoria, or negative feelings, about our bodies can affect our sexuality and sexual practices. Social gender dysphoria describes the negative feelings we may experience when people mispronoun or misgender us through their behavior or language. Body dysphoria describes the negative feelings we may have when our body does not match up with our internal map of ourselves.

Feelings of dysphoria about their genitals or bodies more generally can mean that many transgender young people avoid intimacy, or place very specific restrictions on the types of intimacy they will engage in. Alex Bertie and his partner Jake share their experiences as two transgender young men in a relationship, and how they find ways to creatively negotiate their dysphoria when it comes to intimacy:

> Jake, 19: I think the hardest part about talking about sex and stuff is you have to talk about parts of your body that you don't like, and I think for us it was hard because we were like 'you know that thing'
> Alex Bertie, 19: because we don't want to use typically female terminology, because it makes us feel dysphoric, it makes us feel like shit basically. So I'm not

> going to go ahead and say 'hey babe, touch my…' because that's not okay and it would make me feel uncomfortable (8 December 2014).

Both Bertie and his partner speak at length about the importance of negotiating consent, and constantly revisiting personal boundaries and rules, yet as Bertie notes, such discussions can be hampered by dysphoria, which can make it difficult to speak about particular body parts. This has clear implications for how educators speak about intimacy with transgender students, including implications for how safer sex is spoken about. In the conclusion to this article we explore some suggestions for how educators might engage with the topic of intimacy in the context of dysphoria.

In two separate videos, Trinity discusses first how she lost her virginity to a cisgender male partner, and how this impacted on her psychologically, but how as things changed for her during her transition, she was able to reconcile her negative memories with a greater sense of peace within her body. In the second of these two videos, she says:

> One thing that I do want to touch on and which impacted on my sexuality is the time I lost my virginity… After that situation [of engaging in intimacy with a cisgender young man, an experience that was highly negative and dysphoria inducing] I did kind of go through this phase where I was very like depressed and regretted what I did greatly… In a sense I guess you can say that now [two years into transitioning] I kind of feel like I have more control over my body, and not like my body is controlling me. Which is something which is very nice, and something I am very thankful for since starting my transition, because I know at times being trans you feel like you have no control over your body, but now I feel that I do (Trinity,29 December 2016).

Certainly it is the case that feeling out of control of one's body, or making decisions that are later a cause for regret, are not solely the province of transgender young people. However, our suggestion here based on Trinity's narrative relates to how sexuality

educators may speak with transgender young people about how they balance a desire for intimacy and recognition with a broader need for self-love and care. In other words, in the first video Trinity noted that she had sex because she was looking for validation as a young woman. Later she can see that the validation needed to come from herself, but at the time she was ill-prepared (or possibly ill-supported) to be able to validate herself. In the second video, which we have quoted from above, Trinity notes that her first experience had initially scared her off of sex entirely, and it was only with time that she was able to come into herself as a woman and feel empowered to consider intimacy again.

Re-gendering bodies

As we noted above, one of the ways in which transgender people creatively manage dysphoria is through the re-gendering of genitals and other body parts. This re-gendering of body parts is certainly not a new finding, and is also reflected in research with and writing by transgender adults (e.g. Edelman and Zimmerman 2014; Hill-Meyer and Scarborough 2014; Jones, del Pozo de Bolger, Dune, Lykins, and Hawkes.2015).

Importantly, it has been suggested that such practices of re-gendering don't simply reduce dysphoria, but may also serve to facilitate the entrée of transgender people into dating practices (Edelman and Zimman 2014), albeit through the reiteration of a relatively normative account of embodiment. The potential for normativity aside (here specifically referring to the repetition of normative binaries of active/passive or dominant/submissive in the context of particular constructions of genitals), the re-gendering of genitals and other body parts was mentioned by some of the young people whose narratives we examined as important to facilitating intimacy. For example, Alex Bertie's partner Jake notes that:

> Some trans guys actually like to call their junk, a dick. They like to use male terms… Because you can label certain parts of 'female' anatomy to 'male' anatomy… Like the most sensitive parts on technically 'female' bodied people you can join that and switch for terms for sensitive parts on dudes. (Jake, 8 December 2014)

Echoing the quote from Bertie earlier, Jake notes that terms such as 'chest' or 'junk' may be used, but also that some transgender men refer to their genitals as would cisgender men (i.e., 'dick').. Importantly, however, and as we discuss in the conclusion of this article, we suggest that a focus on re-gendering body parts needs to be delicately balanced with information about the functioning of particular body parts.

What makes for an affirming relationship

Having explored the differing concerns and challenges voiced by the young people whose narratives we have considered, it is important to focus on the pleasures and happiness that intimate relationships can bring many transgender young people. As was the case in the literature we reviewed earlier, many of the narratives we have considered focused less on pleasure or happiness, and more on risk management. Nonetheless, it was most certainly the case that intimate relationships were also seen as a potential source of happiness. Of the narratives that we considered, two key aspects of what might constitute an affirming relationship were mentioned. The first of these, already alluded to above, pertains to the importance of talking and respect, as is evident in the quote below from Alex Bertie:

> I think that's the important part about any relationship… talking about stuff before it happens and just being honest. That's like if you're in a relationship. If you're a trans person who is just going to go out and go and sleep with someone because you want to, that's cool, just be ready for people to ask questions and not understand and you will need to be sure to speak, use your words, and be safe. (Alex Bertie, 8 December 2014)

As should be the case in any conversation about intimacy with young people, discussion and respect are key. For transgender young people, however, and especially in the context of intimate relationships with cisgender peers, it would appear important that experiential differences and the potential lack of a level playing field with regard to expectations or understandings is given particular attention. In other words, while it is important for all young people to engage in practices of negotiation and respect, for transgender young people this may be complicated by a potential lack of awareness or understanding on the part of cisgender intimate partners, or indeed amongst transgender young people themselves. Introducing all young people to ways of communicating needs and desires is thus a central component to sexuality education, while nonetheless acknowledging that this may take specific forms for transgender young people, as we discuss in the conclusion to this article.

The second key aspect that appeared in the narratives we considered was the importance of intimate partners accepting transgender young people as they are. As can be seen in the following quote, this is less a call for a neoliberal form of acceptance where partners discount or ignore the fact that a partner is transgender. As Tompkins (2014) notes, this type of approach marginalises transgender people's sexuality, and may fail to positively engage with transgender people's embodiment and experiences. Instead, as the quote below suggests, recognition of the specificities of a transgender partner's experiences can be paired with creating space for them to just 'be':

> I need to feel safe if I'm going on a date with you or having sex with you. It is *the* most comforting thing. After a long day of existing as a trans person in public and on public transit and at work, I would like to come home and not have to think about anything at all. I don't want to have to think about how I have to sit, how I have to talk, how I have to twirl my hair. I just want to be able to relax and be myself and calm the hell down. Just be patient. (Stef Sanjati, 27 November 2015)

As Sanjati notes, it is important for intimate and/or dating partners of transgender people to acknowledge the daily lives of transgender people – lives where discrimination occurs – but that it is also important to just 'be' in the relationship as two individuals. As we suggested above following Tompkins (2014), acknowledging trans-specific experiences does not mitigate 'just being'. Rather the two together create the possibility for a relationship to be affirming of transgender people.

Conclusions

In this article we have explored a topic that is largely ignored in the literature on transgender young people, namely intimacy and sexual health. While we have analysed accounts posted on YouTube, we have situated this in the broader literature in order to take into account a wider range of accounts. As we noted in the introduction, despite the potentially fraught nature of speaking about this topic, it would constitute a form of cisgenderism by omission to continue to ignore the importance of thinking and talking about intimacy with transgender young people. For educators, this requires a targeted and tailored approach to sexuality education that engages with transgender young people's desires, needs, and experiences. We of course acknowledge the difficulties facing educators in addressing these topics if they don't have access to support and training, and if their work is not supported by policy and curriculum. As others have noted, there is often very little pre-service education and professional development available in relation to sexuality education generally, including in Australia (Ollis, Harrison, and Maharaj, 2013), and this is even more so the case in relation to including transgender people. We also note that such education should not be limited to transgender students. Rather, as potential friends, classmates, and intimate partners of their transgender peers, cisgender students should also be exposed to information about the needs of transgender young people with regard to sexuality education, regardless of

whether there are transgender students at their school or not. We also feel it's important to make the point that, as with all young people, we are not suggesting that all transgender young people want to be or should be in sexual or intimate relationships now or in the future.

The first area requiring attention in sexuality education highlighted by our analysis is the basic need for such education to extend beyond the female-male binary, and the norm of heterosex involving a male with a penis and a female with a vagina. To a certain extent this is already being addressed in some sexuality education curriculum, such as in New Zealand where gender is not discussed as a binary, and where gender diversity and identities are explored (Ministry of Education 2015. For an analysis see Garland-Levett 2017). While our focus in this article is on transgender people in educational contexts, it is equally as important that the experiences of non-binary people are highlighted. Young people who are non-binary may often have experiences that are similar to those of transgender young people with regard to intimacy, but the experience of gender outside of the binary categories of male and female may be a significant point of difference. Educators and sexuality education programs must thus develop ways of talking about bodies and intimacy that shift attention away from the normative association of particular genders with particular anatomies, to encompass a more diverse approach to understanding gender and embodiment.

In terms of gendered embodiment, our analysis highlights the importance of de-gendering body parts. In her YouTube series *Sexplanations,* Dr Lindsay Doe includes a number of episodes focusing on transgender people and sex. In one such episode Doe (2016) emphasises the utility of thinking about genitals in terms of 'erectile tissue' (i.e., what are typically referred to as either a penis or clitoris) and a 'pouch of skin' (i.e., what are typically referred to as either a scrotum or labia). Obviously we would want to

acknowledge that all of these parts (and many others) can produce erotic or pleasurable sensations. Doe's point is that rather than utilising normatively prescribed terminology, it is possible to refer to genitals by their physiological function. Several of the young people whose narratives we examined similarly utilise a range of terms to refer to their genitals, including neutral terms, or terms that are typically used by cisgender people of their gender (i.e., transgender boys referring to their dick). This type of gender neutral or re-gendered language has an important role to play in reducing dysphoria for many transgender young people, but also for increasing the awareness of cisgender young people both about the functions of their own bodies, and the ways that it might be appropriate to refer to a potential transgender partner's body.

Of course, as we noted in our analysis, an approach to speaking about bodies that utilises gender neutral or re-gendered language must be located in a relationship to awareness about sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. As Veale and colleagues (2016) note, transgender boys, for example, who, due to dysphoria or strategies used to manage it, such as re-gendering, may not see their genitals as a vagina, and may not consider pregnancy as a potential risk if they have penetrative intercourse with a cisgender male partner. Importantly, however, the language of 'sperm' and 'eggs' can produce dysphoria for some transgender young people. As such, educators may refer to gametes as a broader category, acknowledging their role in both reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases. It is entirely possible, for example, to speak about the combining of two different types of gametes as resulting in a pregnancy, without referring to egg and sperm *per se.* Again, a focus on function rather than the gendering of specific gametes may be important for transgender young people.

Another issue that was evident from our analysis was the degree to which some transgender young people may be able to consent to intimacy in the face of dysphoria.

Certainly, transgender young people are not alone in regards to the vexed issue of consent. Nonetheless, for transgender young people who view intimacy as a way to affirm their gender, a willingness to compromise their own boundaries or desires in order to experience intimacy problematises the assumption that saying 'yes' indicates consent. Sexuality educators thus have a significant role in speaking with all young people – but here specifically transgender young people – about their motivations to consenting to intimacy. This might involve introducing questions about who the intimacy is for (e.g., to keep a partner, or to validate oneself), and the potential for certain motivations to lead to regret or distress. Again, these are conversations likely to be of use to all young people, but for transgender young people such conversations might help them to consider alternate ways of affirming their gender, or particular areas that will require careful negotiation in order to consent to intimacy.

Related to matters of consent in the context of dysphoria and a desire for affirmation, is the topic of discrimination. While it might be atypical to include a focus on discrimination in the context of sexuality education, we would suggest that conversations about cisgenderism, transphobia, and the ways in which they shape both transgender and cisgender people's dating and intimate experiences is vital. These are precisely the types of conversations that might help mitigate some of the future negative experiences that transgender young people might have (i.e., a reduction in the likelihood of fetishisation or pathologisation if cisgender young people are aware of these), while also preparing transgender young people for the possibility that they may encounter negativity. As opposed to just 'warning' transgender young people about potentially negative experiences, a focus on the broader context of discrimination may help to create positive change amongst young people in general, so as to reduce the likelihood of negativity in at least some instances.

In conclusion, in this article we have made a contribution to discussions about transgender young people and intimacy, specifically in the context of sexuality education. We acknowledge that for many educators this will be unfamiliar, and at times challenging, territory. But it is important that educators acknowledge that it will also be unfamiliar and challenging territory for many young people. And this is precisely why we think speaking about the topic of intimacy with transgender young people and their cisgender peers is so important: so as to make a positive contribution to transgender young people's lives, to signal to cisgender students that intimate relationships with transgender peers can be meaningful, and more broadly to shift transgender people's desires from the realm of the taboo, and into the realm of the intelligible and possible. As Tompkins (2014) notes, a sex-positive approach to transgender intimacy will not occur absent of the acknowledgement of transgender people as sexual beings, nor absent of recognition of the rights of transgender people to self-expression and respect. As Stef Sanjati noted in the quote included in our analysis above, the task is to both acknowledge the specificities of transgender young people's desires and experiences of intimacy, while also creating spacing where transgender young people can just 'be'.

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Table 1: YouTube videos featuring transgender young people speaking about dating, relationships, and intimacy

Video Name	Date Posted	URL	Creator
Transgender Intimacy	8 December 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQtEQaHQp0I	TheRealAlexBertie
Transgender Sex-Ed	25 February 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cquqijgtzTU	Nikki Piława
Transgender Sex Ed + Trans Teen Resources	1 May 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hotZ0SdAp_I	Kat Blaque
My Transgender Sex Life	29 December 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2LbeT-Evxs	BeautyWithTrinity
Caught Losing My Virginity	10 November 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTILsJ3-7Ek	BeautyWithTrinity
Trans Sexuality 101	30 April 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgRP1TFkzAI	Stef Sanjati
How to Date a Trans Woman	27 November 2015	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX1RUm3W4Ts	Stef Sanjati